

Steele Lane Elementary School SRTS Walk Audit

Tuesday, April 23rd, 2024



In attendance: Christina Panza (SRTS Director), Alexander Oceguela (City of Santa Rosa Active Transportation Planner), Mike Vanmidde (City of Santa Rosa Traffic Engineer), Amber Williams (Steele Lane Principal), Cherie Barnett (SCBC Outreach Coordinator, neighborhood resident and former Steele Lane student)

Route: Met at school entrance at 301 Steele Lane. Observed drop off from main entrance and along the school frontage to Berkeley Dr. Walked east on Steele Lane, entered the school driveway east of the preschool, to the field behind the school, and discussed opportunities for improvement in that location. Returned to school via Steele Lane, observing/discussing Steele and Salem Ave. along the way.

Pick up/Drop off: Morning drop off and afternoon pick up for the elementary school takes place in front of the school on the north side of Steele Lane, beginning at approximately 7:40 a.m. That area is designated as a loading and bus zone only, and cars are not permitted to park there. Three full-size buses drop off students in front of the school main entrance between 7:35-7:45 a.m., and two smaller special ed buses also drop off, but farther east in front of the preschool building. There are driveways leading to staff parking lots on both the east and west side of the school, but parents were not observed entering those driveways and drop off in the parking lots.

Between 7:30-7:45 a.m., students may enter the school through the cafeteria, where school breakfast is served. Between 7:45-8:00 a.m., students may enter the school through the cafeteria, the main (front) entrance, and a gate slightly east of the main entrance.

There is an entry point to the school from the park in the neighborhood north of the school, however, students do not enter the school from this location, as there is no pathway from the field (which can get wet/muddy), and the area is unmonitored.

A crossing guard is stationed at the mid-block crossing in front of the school in both the morning and afternoon, where there is a pedestrian-activated traffic signal.

Parents also drop off on nearby neighborhood streets. Numerous parents were observed dropping off or parking and walking from Berkeley Lane, and presumably from other nearby streets.

Pilot Project: Currently, the city of Santa Rosa is in the midst of a pilot/demonstration traffic calming project on Steele Lane, between Meyers Drive to Rowe Drive directly in front of Steele Lane Elementary School, reducing the travel lane on the north side of Steele Lane, heading west, to one lane.

School Information:

Address	301 Steele Lane
Morning Bell(s)	8:00 a.m.
Afternoon Bell(s)	M, T, Th-F: 1 st -6 th grade, 2:06 p.m.; Kinder, 1:00 p.m. W: (all grades) 11:50 a.m.
Grade levels	Tk-6
Enrollment	364 at time GIS map was created, however, Amber indicated that enrollment has increased to ~440 students
School type	Traditional
Student's proximity to school	364 geocoded students in 2023-24 318 live within 2 miles of school (87%) 225 live within 1 mile of school (62%) 46 live within ½ mile of school (13%) 17 live within ¼ mile of school (5%)
Participating School in Sonoma County SRTS program?	No
Student Travel Mode info (Sept 2023 student arrival/departure tally data)	Student arrival/departure tallies have not been collected at Steele Lane in recent years.
Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Programming (2023-24)	n/a in 2023-24

CONCERNS &/or POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

Please note that all recommendations on the following pages are meant to capture potential solutions to issues or ideas raised during the walk audit. Each of these recommendations are subject to additional design, analysis, outreach, funding, prioritization, and approval by the City and/or Santa Rosa City School District prior to implementation.

Concerns and observations:

- The volume of traffic and driver behavior on Steele Lane at pick-up & drop off (and at any time of day for that matter) is a major concern for the school community, and a barrier to safe active travel to school:
 - Speeding – drivers do not obey the 25mph “while children are present” speed limit in front of the school.
 - Drivers often do not obey pedestrian right-of-way and consistently (multiple times per day) “blow” through the mid-block crossing in front of the school, even when the light is red.
 - Drivers make illegal U-turns at Steele Lane and Salem Avenue to enter the school drop-off/pick up zone
 - Drivers make illegal U-turns just west of the mid-block crosswalk traveling east to west
 - Drivers making unsafe turns from Steele Lane to a side street, or from a side street onto Steele Lane, resulting in conflicts or near misses.
- Parents frequently did not pull forward in the drop off/loading zone in front of the school, blocking the flow of traffic in the loading zone.
- A few parents were observed parking or stopping in the loading zone and exiting their vehicles to walk their students to campus. A parent was observed parked in front of one of the small school buses and preventing the driver from leaving the site.
- One parent, who was reprimanded for parking in the loading zone, expressed frustration that she is unable to park in front of the school to assist her three special needs children in entering the campus.
- Vehicles were parked close to corners on Berkeley Lane during drop-off, potentially blocking sight-lines to pedestrians crossing Berkeley as they walked east to school on the south side of Steele Lane.
- With the lack of bicycle facilities and high traffic speeds along Steele Lane, it is unsafe to ride with children along that route.
- The intersection of Mendocino Avenue and Steele Lane is likely a barrier to walking/bicycling to school, as a number of families live in the SRJC neighborhood east of Mendocino, west of North St, south of Lewis Rd. and north of College Avenue, yet the principal reported that she is only aware of one student who walks to school from that direction. One of the three full-size bus routes that travels to Steele Lane Elementary serves the SRJC neighborhood.
- A large number (per the GIS map, close to a majority) of Steele Lane families live west of the 101 Freeway, in the neighborhoods north of West Steele Lane and North and South of Guerneville Rd. west of Cleveland Avenue and east of Coffee Lane. These families lack a safe walking and bicycling route to school. Two of the three full-size bus routes that travel Steele Lane Elementary travel to/from this neighborhood.
- At this time, zero students bicycle to school. The principal reported that one student tried this year, but gave up because it was so challenging.

Response to Pilot Project:

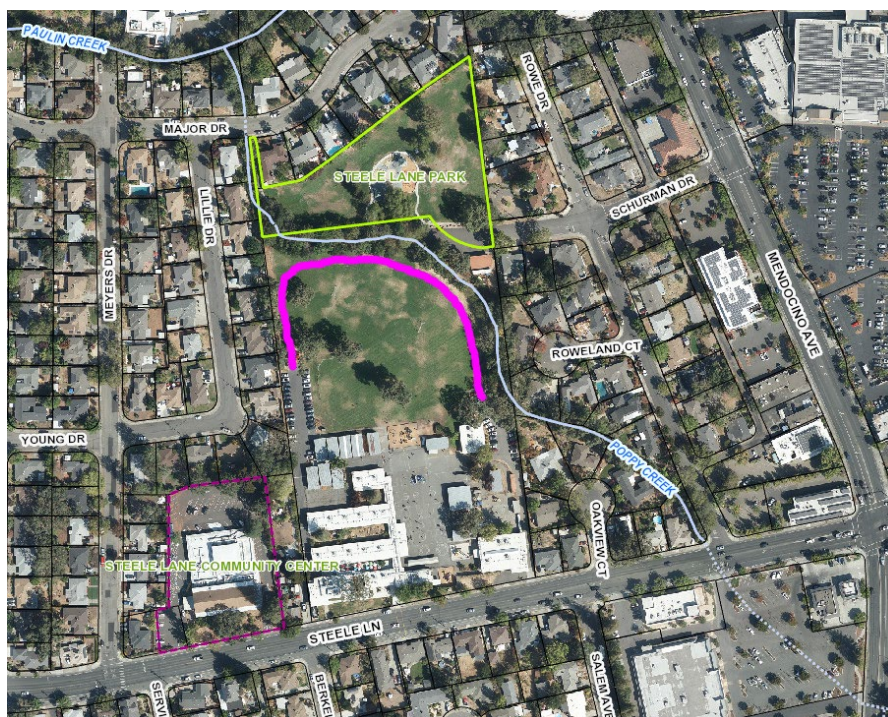
- Principal Williams had an extremely favorable impression of the pilot project and would like to see it continue at least through the end of the school year and, even better, for the “road diet” to become permanent. She indicated that she has not received any complaints from families. In reference to the shorter crossing distance at the mid-block crossing in front of the school, she expressed “It’s amazing! I have 20 more feet to save somebody (*from being hit in the mid-block crossing!*)” Principal Williams also expressed that she would be in favor of reducing the travel lanes on both sides of Steele Lane, instead of just one side, and adding a left turn-pocket. Her priority is to slow down traffic on Steele Lane and increase safety for students and families, even if it may result in congestion from time to time.

- Several staff at the Tk and special needs preschool, who we stopped and chatted with in front of the facility on our route, also expressed that it has been “much better” since the pilot project was installed, that drivers have noticeably slowed down, and that it is easier to enter/exit the school zone. They also indicated that they would love the pilot to become permanent. One staff mentioned that more parents may be stopping/parking in front of the preschool, but that the benefits of the pilot study outweigh those unintended consequences.
- A [Reddit thread](#) demonstrating support for the project (in response to one resident who complained)
- [A survey](#) to solicit feedback on the pilot project is open for the month of May 2024.

Ideas and Potential Solutions:

District/School:

- Consider building a multi-use path in the eastern parking lot connecting to the western parking lot and field behind the school. This infrastructure build would create a low stress off street pick up and drop off zone in addition to providing an improved parking area for faculty and staff. Building this multi-use path would enable parent drivers to avoid busy Steele Lane leaving the current drop off zone to school buses. During school hours when the entrance and exit gates are locked this multi-use path would provide opportunities for students and faculty to have a dedicated walking path that could be used for physical education classes. In addition, building a multi-use path with a connection for students/families to enter the school from Steele Lane Park via Schurman Drive or Major Drive, north of the school would allow a secondary low stress neighborhood connection onto the campus. During the discussion on the feasibility of this project it was also noted that this multi-use path could be utilized for community engagement activities throughout the year that would benefit the school and community at large examples included: food bank distribution site, emergency preparedness events and creating overflow parking for back-to-school night. This would require modification of the current site strategic plan.
- Below is a basic sketch showing roughly the location where a path could potentially connect the two parking areas (pink U). Width and other features of path TBD.



- Consider enrolling in/participate in the County SRTS program, to support continued collection of student arrival/departure tally data, to participate in Walk/Roll initiatives if capacity allows, and to be eligible to receive SRTS services such as bicycle and/or pedestrian safety lessons and/or on-bicycle education programming.
- Consider sharing the following SRTS tip-sheet(s) and videos to support safe walking, bicycling, drop-off, and parking and walking:
 - Walking Safety Tip Sheet [English](#) [Spanish](#)
 - Bike Safety Tip Sheet [English](#) [Spanish](#)
 - Driver Awareness for Safe Arrival/Dismissal [English](#) [Spanish](#)
 - Park & Walk Video [English](#) [Spanish](#)
- Consider enrolling with AAA to establish a student [AAA School Safety Patrol](#) (or alternatively assigning school staff if feasible) to support a smoother, safer drop off. Student Safety Patrols (or staff) can help kids exit vehicles, enable parent drivers to move along more quickly, and even help kids who require support to get to/from class.
- Consider establishing and promoting **alternative drop-off/pick up locations** and/or “**Walking School Bus**” (WSB) meet up spots.

An **alternative drop-off/pick up location** is simply an alternative location where parents are encouraged to drop off/pick up to divert traffic from the normal school loading/unloading zone.

A **Walking School Bus (WSB)** is an adult-led group that walks from a designated location. For a WSB, school “SRTS Champion” (may be school staff or a parent or a team that includes both) must be identified to facilitate promotion and build community participation & engagement. School administration, teacher(s), or even parents may lead the Walking School Bus in the morning on special event days, model safe walking behavior, and enable safety in numbers. Walking School Buses can operate a couple times a year, once a month, or even once a week during certain months, depending on capacity.

The following potential alternative drop off/pick up and/or WSB “meet up spots” are possibilities to consider under current conditions:

- **Steele Lane Community Center** (alternative drop-off location, if determined feasible by city. This may require development of an MOU between the school and city.
- **Humboldt Park** playground (Walking School Bus location): .9 miles, about a 20 minute walk. Requires crossing Mendocino Avenue at Lewis Rd. Could serve families traveling from the SRJC area.
- **A lot on Professional Drive, possibly In & Out Burger** (Walking School Bus location): .3 miles, a 6 minute walk to school, with only one crossing (if meeting at In & Out). Could serve parents driving in from the west.

Should a pathway connecting Steele Lane Park with the school be constructed, additional alternative drop-off/pick-up or walking school bus meet-up spots could be established at the following locations:

- **Major Drive, Nordyke Avenue, Meyers Drive, or Lillie Drive**, utilizing the Poppy Creek pathway through Steele Lane Park to the school (alternative drop off/pick up OR Walking School bus location)
- **Schurmann Drive or Rowe Drive** northeast of the school (alternative drop off/pick up location)

- Report incidents to SRPD when they occur (i.e., if someone is hit in a crosswalk but not hurt, etc), as well as ongoing concerns, near misses, etc.

City of Santa Rosa Public Works:

- Reach out to key staff at City Recreation and Parks to determine if a shared use agreement to enable morning drop-off at Steele Lane Community Center could be feasible, at least for morning drop off between 7:30am-8:10am, if not for afternoon pick up. If feasible, connect school and city to support facilitation of such an agreement.
- Reach out to the Santa Rosa Police Department Traffic Bureau to request targeted enforcement operations during and after the pilot study project, to address ongoing traffic violations along Steele Lane.
- Consider installing a “no U-Turn sign” on Steele Lane near Salem Avenue.
- Consider lengthening the time-frame of the pilot study to extend at least through the end of the school year, and possibly for longer (until a permanent installation can be built).
- Consider a permanent “road diet” on Steele Lane, reducing travel lanes to one in each direction and adding a left-turn center pocket, to continue to support a safer loading zone, shorter crossing distances for students and families, lower speeds, and, in the future, a protected bicycle lane to facilitate safer bicycling along this corridor.
- Review corners and intersections near the school zone to determine where daylighting (restricting parking) of curbs is appropriate, such as the corners of Berkeley Way and Steele Lane Coordinate internally to determine how to improve parking compliance in school zone.
- Consider adding an RRFB (rapid rectangular flashing beacon) to the crosswalk at Steele Lane and Meyers Drive.

Santa Rosa Police Department:

- Enforce speed and other moving violations along Steele Lane during morning and afternoon commute times. Consider a targeted enforcement & education operation in this area, during the pilot study (SR City Public Works requested)
- Deploy speed radar trailer in front of the school (SR City public Works requested)

Safe Routes to School Program Information

- The SRTS program coordinates a Safe Routes to School Task Force to bring together representatives from schools/school districts (school administration, staff and/or parents), city planning/engineering, law enforcement, and SRTS program staff. The goal of the Task Force is to:
 - Seek input from Task Force members and the public, in order to identify barriers to active transportation, opportunities for improvement and collaboration, and set priorities for future infrastructure projects within the city of Santa Rosa.
 - Provide a venue for sharing of program initiatives and projects in the city of Santa Rosa, as well as inter-agency collaboration.

Santa Rosa Task Force meeting notices, agendas, and meeting notes & handouts can be found on our SRTS Task Force page [HERE](#).

- Enrollment for participation in the SRTS program takes place in April each year (deadline is April 30th). Schools must enroll each year to be eligible to receive visiting education services & ongoing technical support. Enrolled, comprehensive sites agree to:
 - Meet with SRTS program staff 3x per year to discuss/plan programming

- Collect student travel tally data in September
 - Provide data for the SRTS program to enable creation of an annual SRTS “study map” showing where students live in relation to the school
 - Engage with/implement a minimum of 5 walk/roll encouragement initiatives per year.
 - Support scheduling & implementation of education programming.
- SRTS encouragement “Walk/Roll” initiatives and promotional materials are emailed to enrolled school contacts every month via our SRTS E-Newsletter, and may also be accessed at www.sonomasaferoutes.org. To request to receive our SRTS E-Newsletter directly, email christina@bikeosnoma.org

Appendix: Walk Audit Pictures:



Pilot project in front of school (before drop-off)



Pilot area during drop off (east of original picture) – cars not always pulling forward



Crossing in front of school – students in “safe zone” inside delineators.



Drop off area in front of preschool (cars sometimes block small bus)



Bus zone in front of school



Vehicles parked on corner of Steele & Berkeley Way



Crossing at Steele Lane & Major Drive (future RRFB?)